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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Thesis

LAMARTINE, ROMANTIC POET

by

Virginia Gray Haley
(A.B., Wheaton, 1929)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
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During the first thirty years of the twentieth century great advances have been made in the science of psychology. We have begun to pay a great deal of attention to the behavior of individuals and to seek the causes of their characteristic behavior. And in this study of the behavior of the individual more and more stress has come to be laid on his childhood. We are finding that the environment and the education of the child as well as his heredity has a great deal to do with his later character and his success in meeting the problems of life. The importance of the influences of childhood and their far-reaching effects are well illustrated in the life and accomplishments of Lamartine.

One cannot however neglect heredity as a determiner of character. The family tree of Lamartine is an old one, and in speaking of his forbears he shows a pardonable pride of ancestry. Though not of royal blood, he is descended from a very old family. His maternal grandmother was a governess at the court of the king and Lamartine's mother was brought up there. Milly, one of the smaller of the several estates belonging to this father's family, was given to the Chevalier de Prat, as the poet's father was called, at the time of his marriage. Released from prison after the horrors of the Revolution, in which he had been wounded while defending the throne, he retired to Milly to bring up his family.

Alphonse de Lamartine, born in 1789, passed his childhood in this country setting. The estate was in reality a small unpretentious house with little land. It was a simple

rustic life that the family led here, surrounded by peasants and affectionately served by them. It was an ideal environment for a growing boy. Alphonse enjoyed an active outdoor life, helping with the farm labors, gathering the grapes, spending days in the fields and living close to nature--that nature which Lamartine so loved and whose praises he so often sung in his poetry. His childhood impressions became firmly rooted. One finds that this affection for nature is more truly a part of Lamartine than of any other Romantic poet. Although Nature is a favorite subject of all the Romantic poets, it is Lamartine who feels its influence most deeply.

Lamartine is criticized--and often adversely--for the strong feminine influence which swayed him all his life. This seems rather unjust for this influence was at all times ennobling and had most beneficial results in his work. It began in his childhood. From his father the poet inherited his fearless courage and his love of family ties and possessions. But it is his mother and five sisters, especially the former, who exert a greater influence in shaping his character. The mother, from all accounts, was a remarkable woman. We get an insight into her character from the Manuscrit de ma Mère, cherished and edited by her son and published after his death. She was above all a true Christian, pious in her actions and attitudes as well as in her beliefs. Although brought up in the society of the times, she readily adjusted herself to country life and enjoyed

its remoteness, which made the family a more complete unit, and which gave opportunity for solitude and contemplation. She enjoyed nature and found great "rapport" between it and her religion. ¹ "On voit ce que le poète a hérité de sa mère, et c'est le meilleur de lui-même: sa sensibilité." Her sympathy and understanding of her only son are unusual. She constantly watches his development and his moods and seems to be aware when all is not well with him. When he is suffering later on from a separation from Mme Charles, although she does not guess the cause of his malady, she divines that something is wrong. ² "It really seems as if Alphonse were bowed down by some by some secret grief, which he does not speak of, but of which my fears occasionally give me a glimpse.....It must be that he has lost, by death of otherwise, something of either present or prospective value, which occasions his profound melancholy."

It was the mother who gave the children their primary education. She had read Rousseau and Fénelon and absorbed their educative principles, but she did not follow them exactly. Hers was an original method. She wished to banish conscious effort and make education a pleasure,--rather a radical view-point at a time when formal discipline was so much in vogue. To this enjoyable and liberal early train-

1

Doumic - Lamartine p. 17

2

Lamartine - My Mother's Manuscript p. 177

ing we may attribute the development of Lamartine's natural optimism--for an optimist he was by nature. The melancholy that was evident at times in his works was more a reaction of his century, an effect upon him of surrounding circumstances, than a characteristic expression of his true self.

¹"On aurait tort d'ailleurs de se représenter Lamartine en aucun temps de sa vie, sous les traits d'un rêveur mélancolique. Tristesse et langueur ne sont pas sa pente naturelle; elles ne sont chez lui que l'effet d'une crise passagère, le résultat du besoin d'activité--ou, comme il dit, d' 'action'--non satisfait." But at the same time we may question whether this type of education was wisest for one of Lamartine's nature. Mme Lamartine herself admits that her only son lacked patience, that he was impetuous and hard to control. Was it not too indulgent a form of education for one who needed discipline? When at the age of ten he was put in an institution, he found it intolerable and escaped. The Jesuit College du Belley which he entered three years later better suited his nature and he made rapid progress in literature, which was his chief interest, and in rhetoric. The four years that he spent there, reading much and making friends, were happy ones. It was at this time that he formed the strong and unusual friendship with Aymon de Virieu, which was to last a lifetime. ²"Sa vie et la mienne ont été

¹
Doumic - Lamartine p. 27

²
Lamartine - Graziella

tellement mêlées depuis son enfance jusqu'à sa mort, que nos deux existences font comme partie l'une de l'autre, et que j'ai parlé de lui presque partout où j'ai eu à parler de moi."

But at seventeen he wearied of school and expressed a wish to take up a military career, much to the dismay of his parents. The idea met with such opposition that he gave it up and returned to Milly where he began to read intensively to escape boredom. It is interesting as well as important to note what he read and to observe its influence on his work. At first he followed more or less the course of reading he had had at college. We find him reading the classics; then Montaigne, Moliere and Racine excite his interest; he finds Voltaire stimulating; his enthusiasm for Rousseau is boundless; and he does not neglect foreign authors; Richardson, Pope, Ossian and Sterne, he reads and enjoys.

It is at this time that romance first flowers for Lamartine. Leisure time, a vivid imagination, the proximity of a charming young girl, all foster his natural impulses and the poet finds himself deeply in love,--or so he believes. The affair has, however, all the aspects of a first young love or infatuation. When his family, becoming alarmed, suggests a trip to Italy, he accepts with little hesitation. The trip is for him an awakening, a broadening of horizons; each new scene leaves him enraptured; each new contact thrills him. Rome is the city of his dreams. There among the ruins

he loved to sit and muse. Like all the Romantic poets, he exalted these ruins and proclaimed against the attempts at restoration. But if he was enchanted with Rome, Naples exerted a still greater fascination for him. There he found color such as he had never before seen. And there, in an idyllic setting, Lamartine again fell in love. For information about this episode we have to rely chiefly on the poet's notes, written many years later, and we ask ourselves if perhaps the poet's memory of the affair has not been colored by his imagination. For three months the romance lasted until again Lamartine's family became uneasy and sent his friend Virieu to "rescue" him. It is not so much the episode itself which is important in Lamartine's life as it is his memory of it. And the memory is of a happy delightful period in which Graziella is but one of the circumstances contributing to the enjoyment of the youth's sojourn in Italy.

The birth of the poet in Lamartine seems to date from this trip to Italy, although he had been writing verse ever since his school days. On his return he entered military service for a brief time but disliked it intensely. He soon returned to Milly and entered upon that period of contemplation of which the fruits were to ripen later. Though he was at times lonely, it was during this period that he "found himself".

Soon occurred an episode which left a lasting impression on Lamartine's character and work. For the first time

in his life he fell deeply in love. While at Aix he made the acquaintance of ~~Mme~~ Julie Charles, a charming young woman, half Creole, older than himself, and married to a physician of twice her years. The circumstances surrounding both their lives were propitious to kindle the flame that burned so strong, though for so short a time. Neither had deeply loved before. Both had a certain "sensibilité", a sensitive appreciation of the good and the beautiful. It was a favorable environment for love, and during the month and a half that ~~Mme~~ Charles remained at Aix, the two were constantly together, making excursions into the country, reading, conversing, and becoming more deeply attached to one another. That winter Lamartine spent in Paris to be near his love. They could not be so constantly together as they had been at Aix but they exchanged notes daily and saw as much of each other as possible. But it could not last. Julie, sick with an incurable disease, passed quietly away in December, 1817. The blow to Lamartine was shocking. As never before had he known true love, so never before had he experienced deep grief. Though a bitter experience we find the Lamartine who emerged from it more mature. Some of his most beautiful poems are an expression of his grief. Through his loss his capacity for love seems to be enlarged. Des Cognets judges, rather harshly it seems, that only through separation did Lamartine ever realize great love. ¹"Douce et brulante Elvire,

¹Des Cognets - La Vie intérieure de Lamartine p. 85

tu l'as enfin compris: pour le posséder tout entier, il te faut devenir une ombre! Alors, éternellement rajeunie par la mort, tu ne craindras plus de rivales, et tu peupleras seule les rêves du poète."

To soften his grief Lamartine plunged himself deep in work. His health had never been good and he complains of its being especially poor at this time. ¹ He thinks he is going to die. But instead we find him completing and publishing the Méditations. Their success was unexpectedly great. Lamartine is praised and fêted and invited to lecture here and there. He finds himself the man of the moment. He spends several weeks in Paris and seems to enjoy the more sophisticated life of the salons.

The previous summer he spent at Aix--a fated spot for Lamartine, it would seem, for it is here that he again loses his heart, this time to a young English girl, a contrast in all respects to Mme Charles. Marianne Eliza Birch was her name and though not a beauty, she was intelligent and charming. Their tastes were similar. She too loved nature and poetry. She was an accomplished musician and an amateur artist. Overcoming such seemingly insurmountable difficulties as difference of religion and parental objections, Lamartine was married the next May and departed immediately for Italy to take up his duties as secretary to the ambassador there. He writes to Virieu from Geneva a few days

¹ Whitehouse - Life of Lamartine p. 200

before his marriage: ¹ "J'aime décidément ma femme, à force de l'estimer et de l'admirer. Je suis content, absolument content d'elle, de toutes ses qualités, même de son physique. Je remercie Dieu.A présent je désire à vivre à cause de ma femme."

The six months spent in Naples immediately following his marriage were about the happiest of Lamartine's life. He was again in the sunny country of southern Italy which he had come to love. His duties were not arduous and he had much free time in which to enjoy nature and become better acquainted with his young wife. His Méditations had been published the preceding March and before departing for Italy Lamartine had been heralded as the poet of France. The aristocracy had immediately adopted him, the press had spared no pains to praise him. Although always extremely modest in his attitude towards his work, this sudden acclaim could have made naught but a pleasant impression on a budding poet. He expresses his content with his situation and with the climate in several poems written at this time, of which the following verse from Ischia is typical.

²

"Doux comme le soupir de l'enfant qui sommeille,
Un son vague et plaintif se répand dans les airs:
Est-ce un echo du ciel qui charme notre oreille?
Est-ce un soupir d'amour de la terre et des mers?"

¹

Lamartine - Correspondence v. 2 p. 477

²

Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies tome I p. 77

But this short period of contentment was not to last long. Lamartine's health, never of the best, became worse in Naples, and the family left for Rome, where a son was born; thence back to France for a few months, and then embarked on a short trip to England. The poet was impressed with the modern comforts of British civilization and admired their architecture. The trip had a sad ending however, when the small son born the year before in Italy, died soon after the return to Paris.

The next year (1823) appeared the Nouvelles Méditations. The reception the volume got far lacked the warm applause of the first volume, in spite of the fact that some of the critics judge the contents equal if not superior to the first collection.¹ Lamartine himself expressed chagrin at its reception and explained the fact by pointing out that the Nouvelles Méditations was the second volume to appear. As a matter of fact, to obtain money, of which he never seemed to have sufficient for his needs, Lamartine sold the volume in advance of its publication. He then composed the work of some pieces already written in Italy and ^{some} hastily conceived at the time.

He was now occupied with the supervision of the building of Saint-Point, the estate at which he afterwards spent much time. Although depressed by the death of his son and the ill health of his wife, he rejoiced

¹Whitehouse - The Life of Lamartine v. 1 p. 269

at the presence of a daughter in the family, born the year before.

The period is a particularly fertile literary one for him. He now wrote Le Dernier Chant du Pèlerinage de Harold, in tribute to Byron who had just died. Soon the Chant du Sacre appeared in honor of the coronation of Charles X. It was received with enormous enthusiasm by the Royalists, but unfortunately for the poet several verses were displeasing to the Duc d'Orléans. The insistence and prestige of the duke caused Lamartine to change the offending lines.

He soon sets out for Italy once more,--this time as secretary of the legation at Florence. Florence charms him as did Naples. He rents a villa, rides horseback, and again enjoys the Italian climate. But his reception in Florentine society is rather frigid. The people have become offended at some verses in Childe Harold which are capable of interpretation to the disparagement of modern Italy. The Colonel Pepe takes the offensive and on a rather flimsy pretext, challenges Lamartine to a duel. The latter, though recovering from an accident, accepts, and thanks to the generosity of his adversary, receives only a slight wound in the arm. The two are then reconciled and become friends. Public opinion rallies towards Lamartine and the rest of his stay in Florence is tranquil. He stays during the term of the ambassador, le marquis de la Maisonfort, a charming man with whom

Lamartine has the most amicable relations. When the ambassador returns to France, Lamartine left in command, discharged his duties to the satisfaction of king and state. For this he expected to receive an ambassadorship but another was appointed to succeed la Maisonfort, and Lamartine, no longer finding the position of secretary agreeable, resigned. It was at Florence that the greater part of the Harmonies were written and they show the influence of the sunny climate of Italy in the temper and in the way they differ from the Méditations.

On returning to France Lamartine finds that his friends have been working to procure for him a chair in the Academy. Having been defeated once before in his attempt to become a member, he declines to make any effort himself, but graciously accepts the post when it is offered. While he is being received and entertained in Paris the shocking news of the death of his mother arrives. The poet is stunned. It is more than the death of an ordinary parent; it is the breaking of an unusual bond; it is the abrupt cessation of a powerful influence.

At this time occurred a world event to which Lamartine reacted strongly--the Revolution of 1830. The time was ripe for a man of action and Lamartine, continually bored by inactivity, was the man of the moment. He made his voice heard in les Révolutions. It was his ambition to ally himself with the state to accomplish the common good of the people. He addressed himself to them in

L'Ode au Peuple du 27 juillet et du 19 octobre 1830. The people, realizing his family and ancestral connections with the Royalist party, could not realize that he wished to act for the public good, regardless of party.¹ "Mais les électeurs simplistes le jugèrent sur ses relations plus que sur ses paroles." He ran for public office but was defeated by a narrow margin.

The time seemed favorable for the trip to the East which he had so long been contemplating. He was not exactly in favor in France, he had broken with many of his friends, his daughter's health was poor,--all of which factors decided him to set out on the long anticipated trip. Combined with these incentives was the desire to seek religious inspiration for the great epic poem which he was contemplating writing. The East was a propitious destination for a Romantic poet. Here he would find strange people and customs, different architecture, the charm of color, and the remains of ancient civilizations. It was a land to wake the imagination and cause it to flower in verse.² "Lamartine est convaincu qu'un voyage est une des grandes émotions de la vie, et que c'est dans les temps modernes, une espèce de devoir."³ In the Adieu

¹ Des Cognets - La Vie intérieure de Lamartine p. 171

² Doumic - Lamartine p. 74

³ Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies Tome II p. 20

written at Marseilles where he embarked, he gives us his reasons for going.

In true Lamartinian affluence he sets out, accompanied by his doctor, six servants, two friends, his wife and daughter. He sails from Marseilles July 10, 1832, going by way of Greece. This country did not come up to his expectations. He leaves his wife and daughter at Beyrout and, with an escort of 25 horses, continues on to Jerusalem, which was at the time experiencing a plague. He obtains special permission to visit the city and goes to Christ's tomb. In this holy atmosphere he feels his doubting faith strengthened, his religious convictions affirmed. He achieves a direct union with God which has no need of interpreters. Thence he continues on through Palestine and Galilee. The trip lasted over two months.

On returning to Beyrout, Lamartine found his family in good health, but with the arrival of the chilly autumn weather his daughter Julie was taken suddenly ill with congestion of the lungs, and died after a few days illness. The poet paid bitterly in remorse for bringing this delicate child into a strange and ravaging climate. Once again he suffered bitter loss. The shock was so great that he became physically ill on the way home. He returned to France a broken man,--broken temporarily that is, for his spirit was one which, in spite of the weight of grief and loss, would rebound if given sufficient time.

In spite of the tragedy of the trip, the poet returned

with a broadened outlook and a self-confidence hitherto unknown. He came back with the idea that there was in France a destiny which only he could fulfill. This idea was in a large part due to the influence of Esther Stanhope, an English woman living in the Orient, and playing the part of a prophetess. Lamartine was greatly inspired by the predictions which she made for him. His secret ambitions had been correctly read and worded by another and as a mortal man he was greatly pleased by the flattery contained in the message.

Le Voyage en Orient, published April 6, 1835, was a direct result of the trip. Its detailed accuracy may be questioned. It relates the experiences of the trip as Lamartine recalls them, aided by his fertile imagination. The influence of the trip is also felt in Jocelyn and in some of his political works published later.

The return from the trip to the East inaugurated another epoch in the life of the man. While in Syria, he had received word of his election to the Chamber. Thus commenced his political life, an activity which in itself would have brought him fame (though perhaps less lasting) had he not been a poet. Rare combination, today or yesterday of poet, orator, politician! Though his political life does not concern us when writing of him as a Romantic poet, it is well to mention his extraordinary eloquence and ability to move people, his independence of party ties, and his devotion to the cause of the greatest good for all.

Henceforth poetry occupied a secondary place in his life. He no longer had ample time to devote to writing. Jocelyn, which appeared in 1836, was criticized for its apparently hasty construction. Less than two years later came its sequel, La Chute d'un Ange. In the spring of 1839 appeared the Recueils Poétiques. Discouraged by the poor reception of the latter, Lamartine decides to write no more poetry. We find exceptions to this decision¹ however, in individual pieces such as La Marseillaise de la Paix, inspired by events of the time. Throughout his political activities, he was always a proponent of peace, such as he expresses in this poem:

¹
 "Allons-y, mais sans perdre un frère dans la marche,
 Sans vendre à l'oppresseur un peuple gémissant,
 Sans montrer au retour aux yeux du patriarche,
 Au lieu d'un fils qu'il aime, une robe de sang!"

Finally, when in 1848 the people for whom Lamartine had worked so ardently turned against him, he retired once more to private life. He is by this time over fifty, but although he has discarded politics, he does not withdraw to an inactive life. He cannot withdraw with honor. He finds himself overwhelmed with debts and it is to the task of paying off his encumbrances that he devotes the remainder of his life. It is a long old age and not a particularly happy one; political glory has departed; he has no longer the inspiration and genius for poetry; he has lost several of his loved ones. To those of us inculcated with New

¹
 Lamartine - Oeuvres Choisies Tome II p. 155

England thrift, this debt of 5,000,000 francs for an individual seems appalling. It may be attributed to three causes: 1) his love of luxury. This, though often cited as the only reason of his great indebtedness is in reality only one factor. 2) his great generosity to his friends and relatives, and to charity. 3) his love of property. He was continually spending to buy new land, to build on it, and to plant it. Not a cent of this indebtedness was contracted however, with intent to defraud. He expected to be able to pay later.

When he retired to private life and had occasion to face the situation, he set about to remedy it in the best way possible. For the first time in his life he felt the necessity to earn money. After a life of literary and political success, in his old age he was for the first time troubled by the petty affairs common to men of lesser genius. He began to work night and day. The literary output of this period of his life is enormous. He published a large number of prose works. He accepted the editorship of a periodical, the Conseiller du Peuple, which was offered him by two Jews and in which freedom of expression was permitted. But his labor was not in proportion to the magnitude of his indebtedness. Milly had to be sold in 1861. This was the greatest blow of all to the poet for he was greatly attached to his childhood home. In his despair he wrote ¹La Vigne et la Maison,

¹Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies Tome II p. 184

the great poem of his old age, in which he describes the bonds which bind him to the land.

He had hoped to keep his land in France by the money brought in from the exploitation of land in the East, ceded to him for twenty-five years by the Sultan of Turkey in appreciation of his poetry and the friendly attitude he had shown the East. To this end he made a second trip to the East in 1850 and returned full of plans and enthusiasm for working the land. But alas, no one would loan him sufficient capital to begin, and he was glad to accept from the Sultan a life pension of 25,000 francs annually, instead of the land. Even at this time when financially embarrassed himself, he continued his endless charity and refused the offer of a syndicate to take over the management of his affairs and pay him a good sized annuity. He offered hospitality as freely as ever and his home was constantly filled with relatives and friends. His optimism and self confidence are amazing. He had complete faith in his ability to pay off his debts within several years.

But gradually he became more and more despairing as he realized the enormity of his task. The sadness of his old age was illuminated to some extent by the devotion of his niece, Valentine de Cessiat, who became the poet's adopted daughter in 1854. She lived with the poet and his wife and after Mme Lamartine's death in 1863, remained to care for her uncle during the last years of his life. In 1867, through the intervention of a friend, Lamartine

was granted 25,000 francs a year from the Government, (the principal, 500,000 francs, to go to his niece at the poet's death) in recognition of his public services. But it was too late to be of much benefit to him. He died, worn out with the struggle with the material universe, on February 27, 1869, and his weary spirit was at last released from a world which had no longer anything to offer it.

Because little had been heard of Lamartine in a poetic way before the publication of the Méditations in 1820, we are too prone to regard this volume as the birth of the poet. As a matter of fact the poems contained in this collection were not the first attempts of a young poet. They were the results of experimentation, of self drill and of training. For years Lamartine had been reading, absorbing, and growing in technique and expression. To be sure the spark of genius had been there since birth, but it had been refined, molded and sharpened until the moment it flowered forth to receive such applause in 1820. By this time the poet had known love and grief, two great experiences of life which had released his spirit into poetry. He had previously written many lines but discarded them as unworthy of publication.

In point of view of time Lamartine is the first of the Romantic poets. It was he who made the first radical

departure in poetry from the inspiration and spirit of the eighteenth century. And it was through a gradual process that Lamartine, the Romantic poet evolved. He had studied the lesser poets of the eighteenth century and adopted these as models for his first poetic attempts.

But Romantic elements had earlier appeared in literature, if not completely expressed in French poetry before Lamartine. Rousseau had startled the world with his revolt against the conventional and the artificial. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had introduced nature and the pastoral element in his novels. Chateaubriand, who became a sort of hero to Lamartine, had recently described the simple harmony and loveliness of nature. England, Germany and the northern countries had experienced the reaction sooner than had France. Works of Young, Gray, Ossian, and others were translated. Shakespeare was being more widely read in France and the imaginative and supernatural elements noted. The translation of Werther made a profound impression on French literature.

Through the works of these authors there runs a streak of melancholy, a sweet and gentle sadness. Lamartine was an optimist by nature. We have seen how he could rebound from grief--it was none the less deep and sincere to him at the time--with a hopeful eye ever on the future. Yet the spirit of the time seemed to envelop him too. How can we explain it? Is it not by his sensitiveness of mind, by his receptibility to external influences?

The spirit of melancholy seems to have been grafted on his nature, not completely subduing his optimism, but blending with it, if such a paradox is possible. This melancholy shows itself at times through forms of nature. We note the dying day, the hazy atmosphere, the spirit of revery enveloping the poet and his surroundings:

¹
 "Souvent sur la montagne, à l'ombre du vieux chêne,
 Au coucher du soleil, tristement je m'assieds;
 Je promène au hasard mes regards sur la plaine,
 Dont le tableau changeant se déroule à mes pieds."

Little by little this spirit pervaded the poets of the beginning of the century until it found its full expression in the Méditations.

Love is the main theme of the poems of this volume,-- physical love refined and crystallized by the union of the spirits which accompanied it. The lines were written at the time when Mme Charles was exerting so strong an influence on the poet, and many of the poems are addressed to Elvire, as he calls her. It is love elevated by generosity, and ennobled by sacrifice.

²
 "L'amour est innocent quand la vertu l'allume.
 Aussi pur que l'objet à qui je l'ai juré,
 Le mien brûle mon coeur, mais c'est d'un feu sacré;
 La constance l'honore et le malheur l'épure."

And as the setting for this love Lamartine uses Nature, the symbol of all Romantic poets. There love is born and there

¹
 Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies - L'Isolement Tome I p. 34

²
 Lamartine - Premières Méditations - Le Temple p. 137



the memory of it is forever enshrined, as so beautifully expressed in Lamartine's chef-d'oeuvre, Le Lac:

¹
 "O lac! rochers muets! grottes! forêt obscure!
 Vous que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir,
 Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle nature,
 Au moins le souvenir!"

In this poem memory and imagination are fused until we cannot tell how much of the poem springs from reality and how much from the mind of the poet. But it does not matter. The significance is not lessened. The universality of the poem makes it more personal to us who read it. The persons involved are not described. The love referred to is that between man and woman, but cannot anyone who has loved, be it wife or child, mother or brother, read his own interpretation into the lines? There is nothing definite or precise to limit one's own version, although physical love is obviously its inspiration.

In Nature also Lamartine finds God:

²
 "Dieu caché, disais-tu, la nature est ton temple!
 L'esprit te voit partout quand notre oeil la
 contemple;
 De tes perfections, qu'il cherche à concevoir,
 Ce monde est le reflet, l'image, le miroir;
 Le jour est ton regard, la beauté ton sourire;
 Partout le coeur t'adore et l'âme te respire;
 Eternel, infini, tout-puissant et tout-bon,
 Ces vastes attributs n'achèvent pas ton nom;
 Et l'esprit, accablé sous ta sublime essence,
 Célèbre ta grandeur jusque dans ton silence!"

¹Lamartine - Premières Méditations p. 77

²Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies - L'Immortalité Tome I p. 32

Nature, as an expression of truth, faith and purity, is the subject of several poems in this collection.

The third important subject of the group is the contemplation of death. The poet has lost his loved one and the loss is a cruel one. His despair is at first expressed in a sense of rebellion. Gradually a calmer sadness creeps over him. He is filled with an indifference to the things of this world and desires only to join his love in the world beyond. We find his thoughts thus expressed in L'Isolement:

¹
 "Que ne puis-je, porté sur le char de l'Aurore,
 Vague objet de mes vœux, m'élancer jusqu'à toi!
 Sur la terre d'exil pourquoi resté-je encore?
 Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi."

But Lamartine finds that life must go on, that time is the great healer of grief, and we find him thinking later on in terms of the happiness which his love brought him and ready to take up life afresh. He tells us this in L'Automne, written after he has met the young English girl who later became his wife:

²
 "Ainsi, prêt à quitter l'horizon de la vie,
 Pleurant de mes longs jours l'espoir évanoui,
 Je me retourne encore et d'un regard d'envie
 Je contemple ses biens dont je n'ai pas joui."

Thus in this volume of poetry we can trace the important events of Lamartine's life at the time, and the

¹
 Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies p. 35

²
 Lamartine - Premières Méditations p. 176

resultant effects on his emotions. There is not a poem in the collection which treats of a public event; not a verse but which reflects the personal emotion or thought of the poet.

Les Nouvelles Méditations, which were received with so much less acclaim three years after the first appeared, continue the expression of Lamartine's life and moods, although the general tone of the poems is quite different. The poet is happily married and enjoying life in the sunny climate of Italy. He relates his happiness and contentment in the companionship of his wife:

¹

"Tandis que sur les fleurs mon amante sommeille,
Ma voix murmurerait tout bas à son oreille
Des soupirs, des accords
Aussi purs que l'extase où son regard me plonge,
Aussi doux que le son que nous apporte un songe
Des ineffables bords."

Whatever tendency to melancholy we find is of a very different sort than that of the former poems. It is rather a wariness of the permanence of a state of perfect happiness. The poet dares not believe that such bliss can last:

²

"Tout naît, tout passe, tout arrive
Au terme ignoré de son sort:
A l'Océan l'onde plaintive,
Aux vents la feuille fugitive,
L'aurore au soir, l'homme à la mort."

¹ Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies - Chant d'Amour p. 83

² Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies - Les Préludes p. 105

There are many love poems in this volume in which Lamartine successfully combines the beauty received through the senses with a spiritual appreciation of its values.

There is more variety of subject matter than in the Premières Méditations. The poet evokes from his memory incidents of his childhood and youth. He introduces history for the first time in his poem ¹ Bonaparte, whom he does not hesitate to denounce vigorously. Several poems, such as the ² Esprit de Dieu, take their inspiration from the Bible. And to this volume is added ³ Le Crucifix, poem which by reason of its occasion and spirit should have been included in the first Méditations. It was written with deep feeling after the death of Mme Charles and is considered one of the best of Lamartine's poems. Because M. Charles was living at the time the first volume was published, the poet thought it wiser not to include the Crucifix in the collection. Hence its appearance in the second volume.

Of the Nouvelles Méditations as a whole, Doumic ⁴ says: "Les premières Méditations sont le plus touchantes: c'est à elles que continuera d'aller l'admiration émue et

¹ Lamartine - Nouvelles Méditations p. 48

² Lamartine - Nouvelles Méditations p. 43

³ Lamartine - Nouvelles Méditations p. 133

⁴ Doumic - Lamartine p. 131

charmé du lecteur, mais supérieures par la hardiesse, l'ampleur, la variété, la sûreté de soi-même, la virtuosité, les secondes Méditations sont très certainement le chef-d'oeuvre de Lamartine."

Les Harmonies Religieuses et Poétiques introduce us to a new type of poetry. The poet, happily married, turns his thoughts from love to other matters. Religion is the main subject of the Harmonies. Lamartine's childhood was spent in a religious atmosphere. His mother was a woman of strong faith and deep religious convictions, which she attempted to communicate to her children. Thus religion to Lamartine was a sort of sentiment, a feeling more than an intellectual solution to the problems of life. The Harmonies are concerned for the most part with the glorification of God. Lamartine relates God to Nature. In the beauty of Nature he finds the expression of God's perfection; in the natural laws of the universe he sees the working of God's hand. We find proof of the existence of the Divine Being through the poet's descriptions of Nature. The beauty of the stars, their infinity and magnitude, prove the everlasting greatness of God:

¹
 "C'est une nuit d'été; nuit dont les vastes ailes
 Font jaillir dans l'azur des milliers d'étincelles;
 Qui, ravivant le ciel comme un miroir terni,
 Permet à l'oeil charmé d'en sonder l'infini;"

¹

Lamartine - Oeuvres choisies - L'Infini dans les Cieux
 p. 173

In a series of four poems,¹ Jéhovah, La Chêne, L'Humanité, and L'Idée de Dieu, Lamartine attempts to prove that God exists everywhere in Nature and the universe. His tribute to God's omnipotence is well summed up in the following lines:

²
 "Mais la raison, c'est toi; mais cette raison même
 Qu'était-elle avant l'heure où tu vins l'éclairer?
 Nuage, obscurité, doute, combat, système,
 Flambeau que notre orgueil portait pour s'égarer."

In this Hymne au Christ we find the effect of the teaching of the church, as contrasted to the more abstract belief of a Christian in the goodness of God's ways. Here the poet adores Jesus as the instrument of God and despairingly questions the lessening of his influence on the contemporary world.

The Harmonies have been criticized as lacking true religious fervor and as being a eulogy of Nature for her own sake. The poet has been charged with being wordy and with using religion as an opportunity for poetical descriptions. Lamartine's belief however, in Nature as an expression of the good in the universe, was a sincere one, and his description of Nature's beauties is but a natural sequence to this belief. Religion to him was a form of emotion, and its expression in the Harmonies was as logical as the similar

¹
 Lamartine - Harmonies p. 136 - 159

²
 Lamartine - Harmonies p. 229

expression of the emotion of love in the Méditations.

But in spite of their sincerity and beauty the Harmonies have had less appeal than the Méditations. The fact that they are religious poems may account for this or it may be that they are written in a too optimistic spirit. Ungrateful as we may be we turn to God more often in time of trouble than of well being. We seek to be consoled by Him. The Harmonies are written in praise of a bountiful God, a God who has endowed us with blessings. They do not so much offer strength in moments of weakness and consolation in moments of deprivation as praise in times of plenty. Does not this limit their appeal?

Lamartine had long dreamed of writing what he intended to make his chef-d'oeuvre,--a poem great in conception and extent. It was his plan to trace the development of the human soul from its beginnings through the ages to ideal perfection. Jocelyn, which he began in 1831 and published in 1836 is one episode of this contemplated chef-d'oeuvre. In it we feel the influence of Dargaud, Lamartine's confidant and oft-time guide in religious and political matters. The episode is based on the facts of the life of a priest of Lamartine's acquaintance, mingled with incidents in the poet's life, and embroidered by his imagination. L'Abbé Dumont, a country priest whom Lamartine had known intimately in his youth, furnished the poet with

inspiration for the central figure of his poem. The factual basis is slight however. But the poet, accustomed to express his own emotions and experiences, finds it almost impossible to be impersonal. We discern incidents in his own life in the scenes where the young priest experiences religious ecstasy, which the poet himself experienced in the little chapel at Belley. So also does he paint with exquisite touch, derived from his own experience, the love scenes between Jocelyn and Laurence.

Although Jocelyn is but a fragment of the great poem which Lamartine had conceived of writing, we find epic qualities therein. We see the soul elevated through human love to divine love. This is the rank Lamartine wishes to accord to earthly love. To him it is never an end in itself, although he continually writes of it and awards it an important place in human life. Through it he aspires to something greater; his soul is freed and reaches heights otherwise unknown. Love demands sacrifice which purifies and ennobles it. In Jocelyn also we find some of Lamartine's social ideals. Here he glorifies work. Rustic life and the work in the fields, which he knew as a child, he makes essential to the art of living. He extols the simple life of the plain people.

The poet himself was pleased with Jocelyn. The years he spent writing it, though interrupted by other

interests and demands upon him, were pleasant ones. He confidently expected its success and he was not disappointed. It achieved great popularity the moment it appeared. The sale of the volume passed expectation. In France alone 24,000 copies of the book were sold in the first twenty-seven days after publication. At the same time however the poet met with much criticism. He was charged with hasty composition and carelessness. It is true that Lamartine was never fond of rewriting and correcting his work, and also true that during the five years of Jocelyn's composition he had traveled and engaged in politics. The criticism was to some extent justified. Lamartine's ideas of Christianity expressed therein were also attacked. He was accused of pleading against the celibacy of the priesthood. Religious critics attacked the validity of his faith. The Pope condemned the poem as heretical. In a poem of such length and treatment there was opportunity for the followers of the church to find flaws; but although Lamartine might dissent on matters of Catholic dogma, he remained true to the fundamentals of Christianity. There is no doubt that Jocelyn¹ is a landmark in literature: "Et Jocelyn, après tout, c'est jusqu'ici dans notre littérature française le seul grand poème en vers que la postérité connaîtra sans fin."

¹

Petit de Julleville - Histoire de la Langue, etc. p. 221

La Chute d'un Ange is another episode in the development of the human soul. It treats the heavenly realm; its characters are angels; the principal, Cédar, is tempted by a woman; to expiate his sin he is compelled to suffer human woes; by this means only can he be pardoned and attain his original status. His adventure is parallel to the Biblical story of the fall of man, and he personifies the upward struggle of humanity. La Chute contains more of Lamartine's philosophy than did Jocelyn. God and life are one to him and are expressed in nature and in humanity. The soul, the only living part of man, is immortal. In La Chute, Lamartine again treats social questions. He believes that pure family life is the basis of civilization:

¹
 "Et vous n'aurez de fils que d'une seule femme,
 Et vous n'aurez à deux qu'une couche et qu'une
 âme;
 Car Dieu vous a créé par couple un sort commun:
 Homme, femme, à ses yeux ne sont pas deux, mais un."

And he advances a theory, more widespread of late than in his time,--the theory of brotherly love, of the breakdown of national barriers and the suppression of war:

²
 "Vous n'établirez pas ces séparations
 En races, en tribus, peuples ou nations;"

But the appearance of La Chute called forth a

¹
 Lamartine - La Chute d'un Ange p. 220

²
 Lamartine - La Chute d'un Ange p. 221

a storm of criticism from the press. Lamartine was out of favor politically at the moment, and this fact, as well as the apparent hasty composition, was detrimental to the reception of the volume. He was accused again of heresy. As a matter of fact, in spite of the urgings of his friend Dargaud, he had no intention of turning against the church. He did not agree with her doctrines to the letter, and he advocated the separation of church and state, but the ties of a lifetime were too strong to break. He hoped to accomplish his social ideals through the church, rather than in spite of her. La Chute is the most objective of all Lamartine's work. In it we find less of his personal emotions and experiences.

These two episodes are all that were achieved of the poet's great scheme. Conflicting interests intervened and the poet became the politician. There was little time now for literature.

Nevertheless Lamartine did not entirely relinquish his poetical work for other activities. The Recueils Poétiques appeared in 1839. Their advent passed almost unnoticed. To the world at large Lamartine was now more "homme d'état" and "orateur" than "poète". The collection as a whole does not contain the unity of the preceding volumes. The poems are of diverse inspiration and subject matter. But in these the sense of ego no longer dominates. They seem more mature, if less original. If the poet is now sad, it is not because of

personal loss, but because of the ignorance and suffering of the whole world. He is more concerned with humanity as a whole and develops the idea of international understanding, as previously mentioned. In the Toast aux Gallois et aux Bretons, he expresses his ideal of unity and understanding:

1
"L'esprit des temps rejoint ce que la mer sépare;
Le titre de famille est écrit en tout lieu.
L'homme n'est plus Français, Anglais, Romain,
Barbare;
Il est concitoyen de l'empire de Dieu!
Les murs des nations s'écroulent en poussières,
Les langues de Babel retrouvent l'unité,
L'Evangile refait avec toutes ses pierres
Le temple de l'humanité."

The Recueils was the last collection of poems published by Lamartine. There are however several single poems which deserve mention. ² La Marseillaise de la Paix, written in 1841, contains his ideals of peace.

La Vigne et la Maison, written when he was sixty-seven, is a poignant expression of the evils of a poverty-stricken old age and of the joys of yesterday.

1
Recueils Poétiques p. 63

2
Oeuvres choisies Tome II p. 151

3
Oeuvres choisies Tome II p. 184

SUMMARY

Lamartine's place in French literature is an important one. He was the first to make a radical departure in poetry from classic inspiration. In the author of the Meditations we find for the first time a poet who addresses himself to the human heart, who casts aside conventions and speaks sincerely from the depths of his emotional experience.

His first poems are impressions. As he continues to write the emotional experience becomes stronger, but whatever emotion is portrayed is sincere and universal in its appeal. There is never anything precise in Lamartine's poetry, but although accompanying circumstances or incidents are not mentioned, the intensity of the emotion suffices to prove its genuineness.

His personality dominates all his work. It is practically impossible for him to be impersonal. All that he sees, hears, feels, is transformed by an inner process before it is expressed. He has the soul of a poet, at once ardent and lofty. An idealist by nature, he noticed the beauties more readily than the vulgarities of the world. He lived in a constant illusion of beauty. His idealism is not a garment donned at will, but a part of his nature.

His poetry is always in good taste. We never find him crude or vulgar. He was the first to put into words the delicate shades of sentiment so difficult to express.

In depicting grief, it is the lasting emptiness that he portrays, not the violent momentary outbreak pictured so often by other poets.

His style at its best is musical in its beauty. Rhythm, melody and harmony are there. When the inspiration is sufficiently great, the form is rich and full. Lamartine is without doubt the most natural of the Romantic poets. He is less interested in language than most of the others. He expressed himself in the simplest manner possible, used the most common words, and wrote not at all for effect. In this respect he differs widely from that great Romantic Hugo, who loved to play with words. Rhyming was almost as natural to Lamartine as thinking. Therefore we find few forced lines. He has been criticized for the monotony of his rhymes. It is true that he repeats certain ones often, but never unless they are in keeping with the thought. There are few concrete descriptions in his poetry. He is a master at conveying ideas, but he seldom depicts an object so that we obtain a mental image of it. He rather conveys to us the emotion which such an object would excite.

At times we find faulty construction. The endings of his poems are sometimes weak, due to poor arrangement of material. Lamartine did not compose. He simply wrote down his thoughts as they came to him. He scorned all methods and rules of writing and he usually refused to revise his poems. Sometimes he would substitute a few

new lines which he deemed better than the existing ones, but careful painstaking revision he declined to attempt. He was a genius rather than a craftsman. But the devices of the craftsman whom he scorned, could without doubt have given a higher polish to his genius!

We are apt to associate the idea of revolt with Romanticism. Most of the Romantics, were they poets or prose writers, revolted against something or someone. Lamartine did not revolt. His evolution into a Romantic poet was a gradual inner growth and its resultant expression. His debut was made without consciousness of the great chasm which was to divide the Classic and Romantic schools. And as the "lutte" between the two became more serious, he remained aloof, indifferent to literary theories, and unwilling to accept the title of head of the Romantic school.

To be a great poet was not his primary aim in life. He was particularly modest about his poetical achievement, reserving his vanity for his personal and political success. After mentioning some of the great poets of the world, he says of himself: ¹"Quant à moi, je n'ai pas été doué ainsi. La poésie ne m'a jamais possédé tout entier. Je ne lui ai donné dans mon âme et dans ma vie seulement, que la place que l'homme donne au chant dans sa journée: des moments le matin, des moments le soir,

¹ Premières Méditations - Préface p. xx

avant et après le travail sérieux et quotidien."

However that may be, our enjoyment of his poetry during moments of leisure, when we seek the beauties of nature and religion, is not lessened. Although Lamartine is not one of the great poets of all time, his place is a most important one in the development of Romanticism and the poetry of the nineteenth century.

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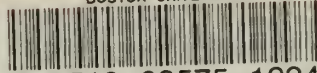
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